



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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STEP 2: DETERMINATION of whether to PREFERABLY PRESERVE

Site: 24 Webster Avenue

Case: HPC.DMO 2020-19

Applicant: The 24 Webster
Building Trust

Owner: same as applicant

Proposal: *Demolish principal
structure.*

HPC Meeting Date: October 20,
2020*



I. MEETING SUMMARY: Determination of Significance

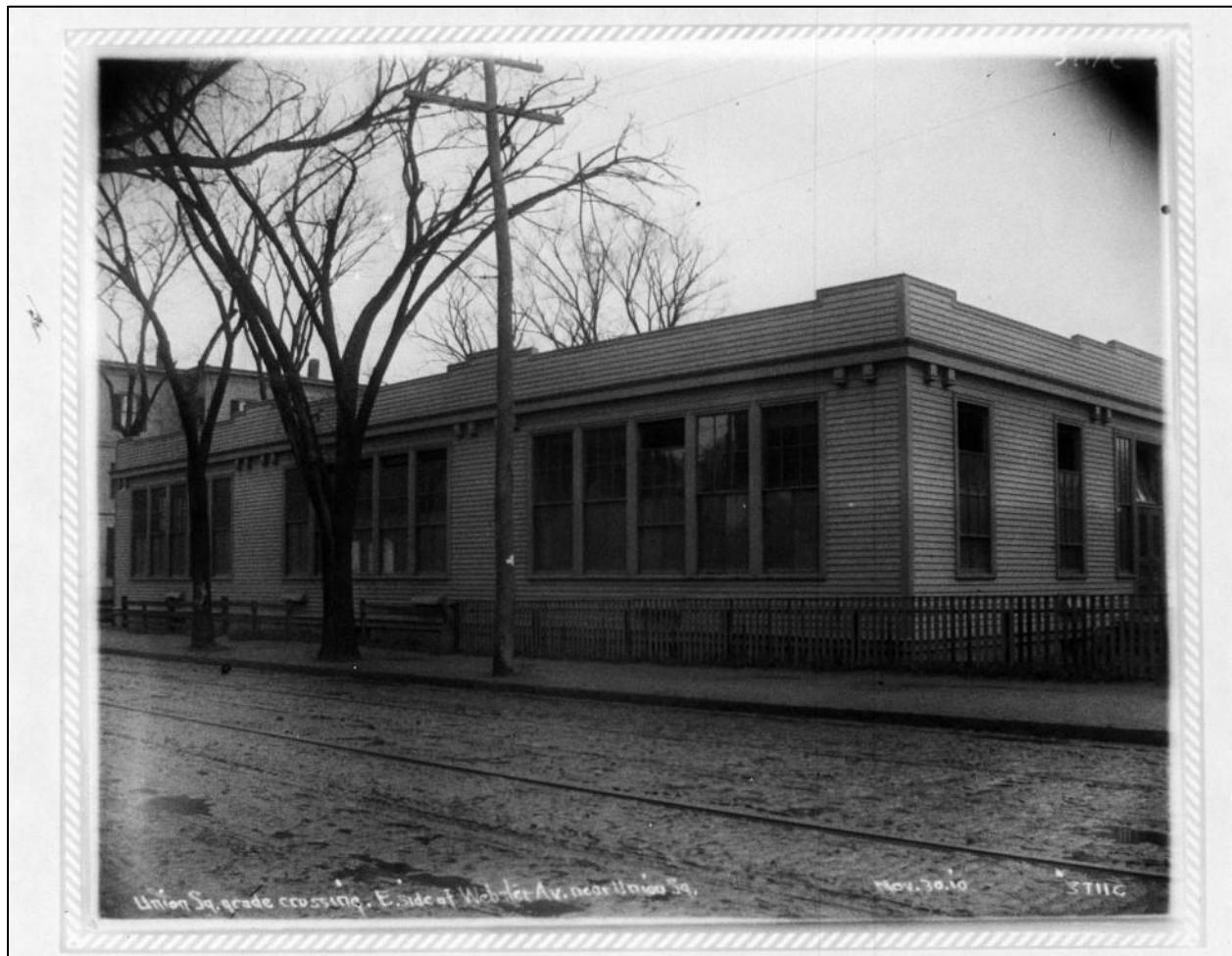
On Tuesday, September 15, 2020, the HPC voted the principal structure at 24 Webster Avenue to be “historically significant”.

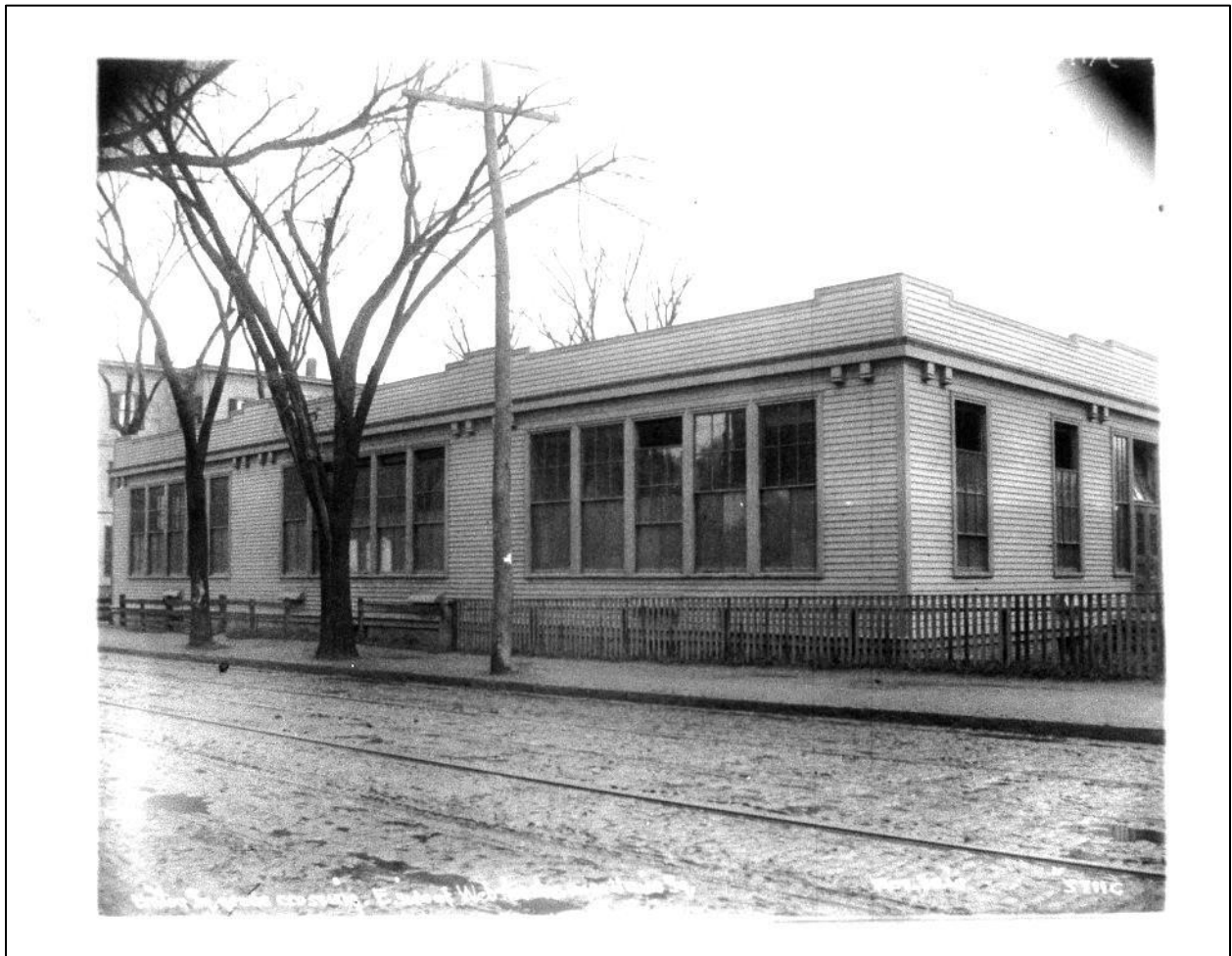
In their deliberations the HPC noted that this structure was historically significant based on criteria “i” and “ii” of Section 2.17.B of the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO) 2003-05. The HPC noted that the building retains its massing and original form with quite a bit of detail still in place (pilasters, entrance doorway window), although covered in some places by siding. The HPC also noted, in a positive sense, that this is an anomaly of a building; it presents a character-defining architecture that distinguishes this building from the little niche of houses surrounding it. The HPC also noted that the building has been extant on the site for approximately 100 years.

II. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Refer to the Staff report on “historic significance” for a full description of the documentation previously provided on this property.

One additional historic photograph of this building has been uncovered showing the structure from the Webster Avenue elevation. The photo is from Historic New England’s collection and is dated November 30, 1910. (Note, the original photo is dark and is the first image below. Staff has provided the darker image so that the date and inscription can be seen. The second image below is the same photo, but Staff has adjusted the contrast and brightness for ease-of-viewing the building’s details.)





III. FINDINGS ON PREFERABLE PRESERVATION

If the Commission determines that the demolition of the significant building or structure would be detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City, such building or structure shall be considered a preferably preserved building or structure. (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 4.2.d) A determination regarding if the demolition of the subject building is detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City should consider the following:

How does this building or structure compose or reflect features which contribute to the heritage of the City?

- a) What is the remaining integrity of the structure? The National Park Service defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance.*

From the “historic significance” staff report:

Due to additional photographic evidence found in Historic New England's collection, Staff is revising start of the significance period from 1900-1921 to **1900-1910**.

- a. Location: The structure is in its original location.
- b. Design: Rectangular form, two-story, flat-roofed building. Simplified parapet. Cornice present. Stylized Classical Revival surround to inset Turkish-style window (period Exoticism). Running bond on brick foundation.
- c. Materials: Wood frame; brick foundation; aluminum siding; rubber membrane roof; metal main entry doors; wood side stairs; side door appears to be wood; wood cornice; wood faux panels on Everett and Webster Avenue elevations; wood Classical Revival inset window surround.
- d. Alterations: Crenellations to parapet not observed; cornice decorations removed. Original windows removed and original window openings closed/covered. What appear to have been pyramidal-form rooftop monitors have also been removed. Original entry doors removed. Building skinned in aluminum siding. It is unclear what or if any original wood siding remains underneath due to the removal/closing of the original windows.

Evaluation of Integrity: While the building retains overall integrity of form, as noted in the "Alterations" discussion above, a significant number of key architectural components and details have been lost. The Everett Street elevation Turkish-style window with Classical Revival surround and the wood cornice line, remain.

What is the level (local, state, national) of significance?

Local significance. The structure is associated with St Joseph's Church and the parochial schools (boys' and girls' schools) that they ran in Union Square. 24 Webster Avenue was once the girls' primary school. The church divested itself of the property in 1965.

What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?

The structure is sited at the corner of Everett Street and Webster Avenue, which is a heavily-travelled thoroughfare in the City.

What is the scarcity or frequency of this type of resource in the City?

As noted by the HPC in their determination of historical significance, the building is an architectural anomaly. Though classified on the Form B survey form as having "no style" but colonial revival elements, Staff offers that the Turkish form window over the entry door on the Everett Street façade is indicative of architectural Exoticism. Exoticism, which encompassed Egyptian Revival, Arabesque, Turkish, and other then-deemed "exotic" architectural styles, was seen in American institutional, commercial, and domestic architecture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Upon a consideration of the above criteria is the demolition of the subject building detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City?

Staff offers no assessment on this criterion.

IV. VOTE

1. The HPC must vote whether or not demolition of the structure at 24 Webster Avenue would be detrimental to the City in terms impact on Somerville's
 - architectural heritage
 - cultural heritage
 - political heritage
 - economic heritage
 - social heritage.
2. If the HPC determines that the demolition of the structure would be detrimental to the City based on any of the criteria above, the HPC must support its position with explanations of *why* demolition would be detrimental based on the evidence presented and observations made by the Commission.
3. If the HPC determines that the demolition of the structure would *not* be detrimental to the City based on the criteria above, the HPC must support its position with explanations of *why* demolition would not be detrimental.